CHINESE ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING.

The late events in China may probably be the opening of a door of interest and discovery, the lock of which has been for all practical purposes fast closed upon us for centuries. To be made familiar with that singular people, and to learn from them—for that we may do, whatever may be the opinion we have formed of their inferiority—will add largely to our stock of knowledge, and in many instances for practical ends. It is true they have been a most stationary and non-progressing people—their buildings of to-day are little varied from those of an aboriginal era—the same features (tent-like) maintain in their every structure, so that when Lord Macartney passed over their territory some fifty years ago, and met the Emperor in convention on its confines by the great Tartar wall, he compared the Chinese encampment prepared for that occasion to one of their complete cities, the same type and character prevailing—the original Tartar tent. There is an exhibition now open in London of Chinese collections, which we propose to visit and make notes upon for the amusement of our readers. The tools used by Chinese builders are there shewn, and are very curious in their rudeness and barbarity. An English carpenter or cabinet-maker would feel himself sadly puzzled to set about the fabrication of the simplest article without the aid of more than these; and yet the Chinese are not deficient in the nicest description of joinery, cabinet work, and inlaying.

The grand entrance to the palace is by the southern gate, the central avenue of which is reserved exclusively for the Emperor's use. Within this gate is a large court, adorned with bridges, balustrades, pillars, and steps, embellished with figures of lions and other sculptures, all of fine marble. Beyond this, is the Gate of Extensive Peace, which is a superb building of white marble, 110 feet high, ascended by five flights of steps—the centre one being reserved for the Emperor. Two more halls and three flights of steps lead to the palace of the Sovereign, which is called the Tranquil Region of Heaven; while that of his consort is entitled the Palace of Earth's Repose. This is the loftiest, richest, and most magnificent of all the palaces. In the court before it, is a tower of gilt copper, adorned with many figures, beautifully executed. On each side of the tower is a large vessel of gilt copper, in which incense is burnt day and night. Beyond the residence of the Emperor and Empress is the imperial flower-garden, laid out in beautiful walks, and adorned with temples, pavilions, and grottoes, interspersed with sheets of water and rising rocks, which vary and beautify the scene. Behind this garden, is a library of immense extent, which is near the northern boundary of the sacred city.

East of these buildings, which lie between the southern and northern gates, are the Council Chamber, a number of princely palaces, and the Hall of Ancestors of the Imperial Family. To the west, are the picture-gallery and printing-office, the principal magazines, and the apartments for the females. The palace is about two miles in circumference, with walls thirty feet high and twelve feet thick.

North of the palace wall, is the King-shan, an artificial mount, with pavilions and shaded walks, and abundantly supplied with game and singing-birds. There is also an artificial lake, a mile and a half long, and a third of a mile broad, crossed by a white marble bridge of nine arches. In the midst of the lake is a marble island, adorned with temples, and surmounted by an obelisk, which affords a delightful view of the surrounding gardens. A temple, dedicated to the discoverer of the silk-worm, stands near the lake, where the Empress and ladies of the Court attend to the cultivation of silk.

In the Tartar city, nearly fronting the palace, are the courts of the six grand tribunals, with the office of the astronomical board, and the observatory. At the south-east corner of the grand national college, and near it, is the hall where the literary examinations for the capital are held. The northern part of Peking also includes a college for the cultivation of the Chinese and Manchu languages, and one for the study of Tibetian—a Mahommedan mosque, a Russian and a Roman Catholic church, and numerous Buddhist temples—of which the white pagoda temple is one of the most remarkable.

The Southern or Chinese city is the great seat of commerce and pleasure—theatres and other places of amusement not being allowed in the Tartar City. In the south-eastern part of the Chinese City, and near to the temple where the Emperor sacrifices to heaven, is the Shin-nung-tang, or temple dedicated to the inventor of agriculture. It is surrounded by a high wall, about two miles in circumference, and the Emperor visits it annually in spring, to offer sacrifices and cultivate the ground. The field which the Emperor tills is covered with a kind of tent, made of mats. When he has ploughed about half an hour, he ascends a neighbouring eminence, whence he examines the work of the Princes, Ministers, and Mandarins, who, guided by the most experienced cultivators, plough in the open air. While they are at work, the court musicians sing hymns, composed in ancient times, in honour of agriculture. The Emperor, the Princes, and all who engage in this ceremony, are dressed like farmers. The plough used by the Emperor is painted red, varnished, and ornamented with gold. The horns of the oxen that draw the plough are gilded, and are never used on any other occasion. While the Emperor is at work, the Empress and her women prepare a dinner for him in a neighbouring apartment. The corn produced by the Emperor's labour is used to make cakes for the sacrifices to heaven, and he prepares himself for the performance of these ceremonies by fasting, prayer, and seclusion.

Many places in the vicinity of Peking are sufficiently interesting to merit description, but to prevent this article exceeding to an unreasonable length, we must limit ourselves to a brief notice of the celebrated gardens of Yuen-ming-yuen. The space included within this royal demesne exceeds ninety square miles, and contains thirty different residences belonging to the Emperor, with all the necessary appendages to each. The hall of audience is one of the handsomest structures. Its length is 110 feet, breadth 42 feet, and height 20 feet. A member of Lord Macartney's Embassy remarks, on arriving at Yuen-ming-yuen, about the dawn of day, "We beheld unusual charms in the hills, trees, and flowers which surrounded us. Fields of nelumbo rearing high its glossy leaves and gorgeous flowers, edged by trees with the foliage of the cassia, spread at our feet; whilst the Tartar Mountains, approximated by the haze of the morning, rose in the distance. All the descriptions which I had ever read of the paradisiacal delight of Chinese gardens occurred to my imagination."

TO ARCHITECTURAL STUDENTS.

Every three years there is an election of an Architectural Student at the Royal Academy, who has one hundred pounds per annum allowed him to make his continental tour, with thirty pounds towards travelling out, and the same for his return. This is the whole amount of our national munificence in furtherance of the objects of architectural exploration,—we might almost say architectural education! What a reflection on a great country, and this boasted era of civilization! At best, however, this provision for foreign travel, reminds one of a tale told of the meeting of some cognoscenti abroad, at which an Englishman was present, and the question turning upon some celebrated structure in his own country, he had, to his confusion, to confess his ignorance of it, and to submit to the reproachful astonishment of the foreigners, who marvelled that a man should be exploring distant regions and be at the same time ignorant of equal, if not superior, merit at home. So it is, in a great degree, with this foreign mission of our young architects. No sooner do they emerge from their clerkship, than at a great expense and equipment they hurry off to classic lands and scenes to acquire the diploma of travel, without which it is thought by many they are not qualified for practice in their profession. Not that we would be thought for a moment to undervalue the acquirements which a well-timed and judiciously pursued search in these supreme territories of art is calculated to procure, but we assert it, that for many, and for most, there is more to be learnt, and more good to be done, by an exploration at home.

To those, then, who think with us, and who are devoted to the prosecution of their art, and who are prepared to take either the one or the other "travel," as it may seem best, we hold out the invitation to co-operate with us in our proposed delineation of the ancient architecture of our own land. We refer to our second and third numbers, under the head "Gothic Architecture;" and now repeat, that our plan is to explore and delineate, in regular series, the various interesting edifices of each era; not only as to the beautiful in design, but also as to the process and character in construction; to shew how the mason, carpenter, &c. of each era prepared and put his work together; and to accompany the whole by a glossary and descriptive chapters, that will be invaluable to the author and compiler, as well as to the public, and will form, if properly and assiduously managed, the best possible title of qualification for the young architect or architects, who may be able to refer to their series of essays and delineations in The Builder.

We scruple not to say that this presents more advantages than the provision of the Royal Academy itself; and so convinced are we of it, that if we were young and setting out on our own mission of peregrinatory study, and were offered the home circuit without an allowance, and the pages and purpose of The Builder, with its publicity, and the correctness, regularity, industry, and system, which these would superinduce, we would prefer it to the foreign, and the allowance of the Royal Academy to boot. Once only in three years, however, we remind our student readers, that the other chance is open to them. Let those who prefer this accept it while it is open to them, for we are now making our arrangements.

THE PATENT IRON MASON.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE BUILDER.

Dear Sir,—It was my wish, during the past week, to have addressed a few observations to you on the above-mentioned subject, but was prevented, my time being fully occupied; but, as I perceive the subject continued, I take the liberty of submitting the following remarks for you to make that use of them you think proper. Let me preface my subject, however, by saying that I most cordially agree with you on the subject of machinery, and would wish to see more manual and less mechanic aid called into operation for the production of articles both domestic and scientific. But now to my subject: the *first* time the Iron Mason was mentioned in the public journals was during that foolish and unfortunate business at the House of Lords, &c.—I allude to the "mason's strike;" if, therefore, any harm arises to the masons from the introduction of machinery in opposition to their labour, it arises from their own folly; "and, like the German student, in some tale of romance I have read, they have created a monster for their own destruction." In answer to the remarks of a "Practical Mason," I beg to refer him, for the capability of steam, to the "marble works in Esher-street," where he will see how much manual labour is reduced by the application of machinery, and which fully corroborates your concluding remarks upon the subject. With regard to the word "foolish," I have used above, my meaning is this,—with the ruinous effects of such "strikes" before their eyes that have taken place, sensible men should resort to such means to redress any imagined wrong. I allude to the great strikes at Preston and Glasgow, 1836-7; was not the consequence then the same as now, the greater introduction of machinery into trade? numbers constructed mills that did dispense with spinners altogether—others have succeeded, by machinery, in reducing the numbers required one-half. I quote from a friendly publication of the time, and from which I can furnish a statistical account if required. I will conclude these observations by saying that I have made them with the very best intentions, and with a sincere wish for the practical man's welfare.

On the subject of machinery I wish to ask a question. Will any of your correspondents give an account of the "machinery for cutting veneers," that makes a spiral cut round the log, and takes the veneer off (as a lady might unroll a ribbon) till the whole log is expended? If these remarks meet with your approbation, you can give them to the public in whatever shape you will.

I remain, dear Sir, your sincere well-wisher,

OFFICINATOR.

With regard to the information required upon "wood bridges, &c.," a great quantity of useful matter on that subject is contained in the first number of the Architects' and Engineers' Journal.

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